

I decided to go for the top, because I was getting weak by holding my ice tool in my left hand. I had to work at it to keep it in the ice. I had only about one and a half meters to go to the top. I chopped a hole for my tube pick and I went to place my right pick in. I peeled away from the ice. Before I fell I got a jittery feeling and had a feeling of fear that things were in shape up here. The ice wasn't as solid as it was below and taking my concentration off what I was doing I fell 12 meters. My protection pulled out on the way down. I did a complete back flip and landed on my feet. As soon as I hit the ground I rolled backwards upside down suspended over a ledge. I yelled I was okay. I had so much adrenaline in me I couldn't feel anything. I was lowered about ten feet (three meters) to a ledge and Chris told me to do a body exam. I knew my left foot was broken so he tied me off and I rappelled down the rest of the way where I was carried off the hill by the rest of my team.

I've climbed Mt. Rainier and have done other climbs after surgery of my left foot. The doctors sewed my left foot on pretty good I guess. I'll be more careful this year. (Source: Report sent to U.S. editor by Bob Betsworth, dated December 14, 1986)

*(Editor's Note: Our thanks to Mr. Betsworth for his honest self-analysis.)*

## **FALL ON SNOW, INADEQUATE BELAY, FALL INTO CREVASSE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, FATIGUE, WEATHER**

### **Washington, Mount Rainier**

On February 28, 1986, the Gary Speer (34) climbing party of four departed eastern Washington and drove to Carbon River Entrance. The next morning they met Ranger Semler and registered with him for a climb of Liberty Ridge. Leaving the Carbon River road around mid-day, they arrived at and stayed in the Dick Creek BC camp. The next day they hiked and climbed to 2760 meters on Liberty Ridge and made a bivouac. Already part of the party was beginning to show signs of tiring. The next day, a short one, the party climbed the remaining 450 meters or so to the high camp at Thumb Rock. There they say they dug a shallow snow cave, using only ice axes, as they had no shovels. At that point it was realized that Stan Jenoway (25) would not be able to make the climb, so he and Speer decided to retreat down the ridge the next morning.

At 0900 on March 4, the party of two left, going down hill back toward Carbon River. As well, the climbing party of two, Markus Hutnak (19) and Richard Mjelde (33), left Thumb Rock high camp at 0900 for the upper Liberty Ridge route. The climbing party took longer than they thought they would and ended finishing well into darkness. On the summit that night, the party made another bivouac. Early the next morning, in rather poor weather and poor visibility, the party began descending toward Camp Muir on the Ingraham Glacier Direct route. Around 3800 meters the party suffered a series of fairly severe falls, pulling each other down in a tumbling ball. The major part of the fall was around 18 vertical meters to an upside down position, wedged into a crevasse. Injuries were sustained in the fall. Taking around two or three hours to extricate themselves, they found that another bivouac overnight was needed. They stayed that night around 3680 meters immediately next to Gibraltar Rock.

Early on Thursday, the party descended to Camp Muir via Cadaver Gap. They radioed from Muir that they had made it down, but had suffered a fall and had injuries. They intended to melt snow, have some water and soup, and descend the rest of the way to Paradise in intermittent cloudy and clear periods that day. They were tired, very wet

and moving slowly. Around 1330 they left Muir. Enroute to Paradise they became disoriented and lost, and failed to make it down. This necessitated yet another bivouac. By this time they were soaked. On Friday, Hutnak and Mjelde, with assistance of Mount Rainier rangers, made it to Paradise, arriving around 1230.

Injuries were treated and the party of four departed Paradise enroute home planning to stop at a hospital in Yakima. Injuries consisted of lacerations, contusions, and minor frostbite. (Source: Bundy Philips and Gary Olson, SAR Rangers, Mount Rainier National Park)

### **Analysis**

The party could have been a bit more cohesively strong. Better evaluation of members' physical conditioning should have been done prior to trip departure. This could have possibly identified weak members which would have provided a stronger and larger summit party. This could have prevented the crevasse fall. The group should have had shovels and/or snow saws with them, especially given the existing weather and the forecast. As well, they should have possibly taken tents. Anchors should be placed solidly when used rather than using a poor placement and depending on it. This could have possibly checked Mjelde's fall. Consideration should be made to wait out a storm rather than travel in badly crevassed areas during poor visibility and weather. With shovels caves could have been dug to make for fairly comfortable accommodations. This could have possibly prevented further frostbite injuries.

Rainier Rangers, however, tip their hats to these hardy souls for enduring what had produced many fatal accidents. Their persistence and willingness to continue very definitely saved their lives. (Source: Rick Krischner, SAR Ranger, Mount Rainier National Park)

*(Editor's Note: Mr. Mjelde sent us a personal account which does not differ from this significantly. In his analysis, he says, "We were prepared for the worst type of weather and therefore we were not in any problems due to the weather. I would stress [to] anyone going to climb any major peak to be prepared for the worst and hopefully never have to use it.")*

## **INADEQUATE PROTECTION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, NO HARD HAT**

### **Washington, Index**

On March 16, 1986, Paul Birdstrup (35) was climbing Magic Fern (5.8+) on Index Town Wall, a one pitch route. Doing the 5.8+ moves, the climber took a minor fall and became frustrated and slightly frightened. Climbing farther up, he took one more small tumble and decided to be lowered down by his belayer. He set up a sling around a horn to be lowered off; however, he was too high above the horn. He put his weight on the sling, which popped off the horn. He fell approximately 15 meters to the ground, due to no protection in below the horn. His head impacted on a large stump, breaking his skull into many pieces. (Source: Robert Madsen)

## **FALL ON APPROACH ROCK, CLIMBING UNROPE**

### **Washington, North Cascades**

On March 22, 1986, Ulrich Ganz (46), Juan Esteban Lira (33) and I (Mark Dale [31])